



JAIME EGUIGUREN

THE AGONY IN THE  
GARDEN AND CHRIST  
AT THE COLUMN

BY ALEJO FERNÁNDEZ



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ART & ANTIQUES



# FOREWORD

A year ago when I discovered Jesus on the Way to Calvary, one of Alejo Fernández’s masterpieces, I never thought that two other works of this German genius who left his best works in the 16<sup>th</sup> -century Spain would pass through my hands this soon.

*The Prayer in the Garden* and the *Christ at the Column* are two wonderful works that, in their small format, sum up the best of this Central European artist: a night full of mystery and a palatial interior where the elegant figure of Christ acquires the position and elegance of a classical sculpture. Alberto Velasco tells us about it in this magnificent studio that I now present to you.

Alejo Fernández was one of the giants of the Spanish and European Renaissance. Despite its well known production, its figure has continued to grow and it is, as we see in these magnificent works, the perfect synthesis of a medieval Europe formed by the new art. Attribution and a stylistic and iconographic analysis, has also taken the opportunity to present a new vision of the artistic output of the master, putting forward new suggestions that constitute a major contribution to the history of Renaissance Hispanic painting.

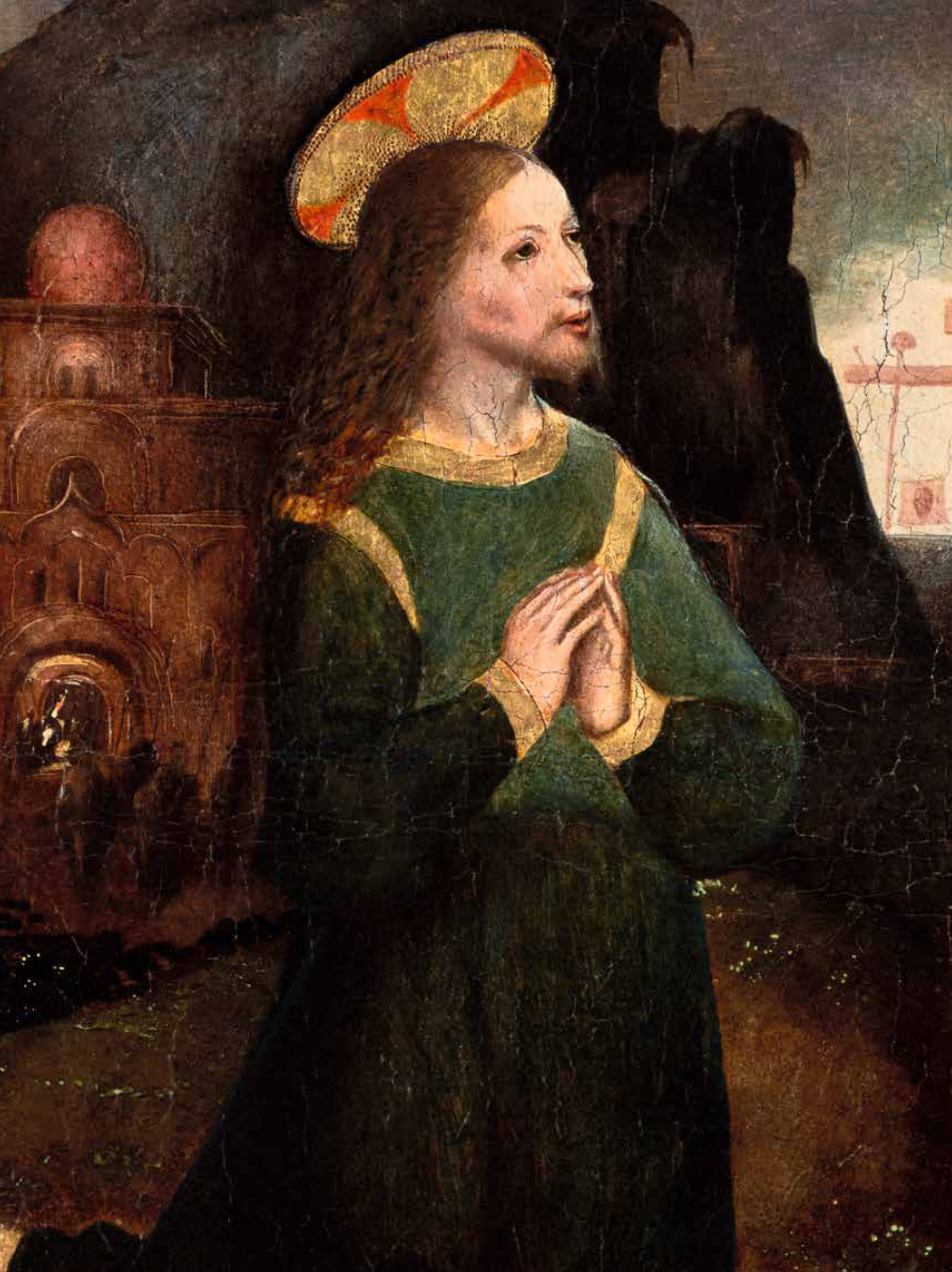
JAIME EGUIGUREN

# *THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN AND CHRIST AT THE COLUMN*

By Alejo Fernández



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ALEJO FERNÁNDEZ (DOC. 1496-1545)

*THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN.* Fig. 1.

*CHRIST AT THE COLUMN.* Fig. 2.

Oil paint on wood panel (transferred onto canvas)

Seville, ca. 1508-1510. 57cm x 48.3cm (each one)



#### Provenance

Barcelona, collection of Josep Maria Milà i Camps, Count of Montseny (ca. 1931-39); Barcelona, private collection (1987); private collection (2019).



## DESCRIPTION AND ICONOGRAPHY

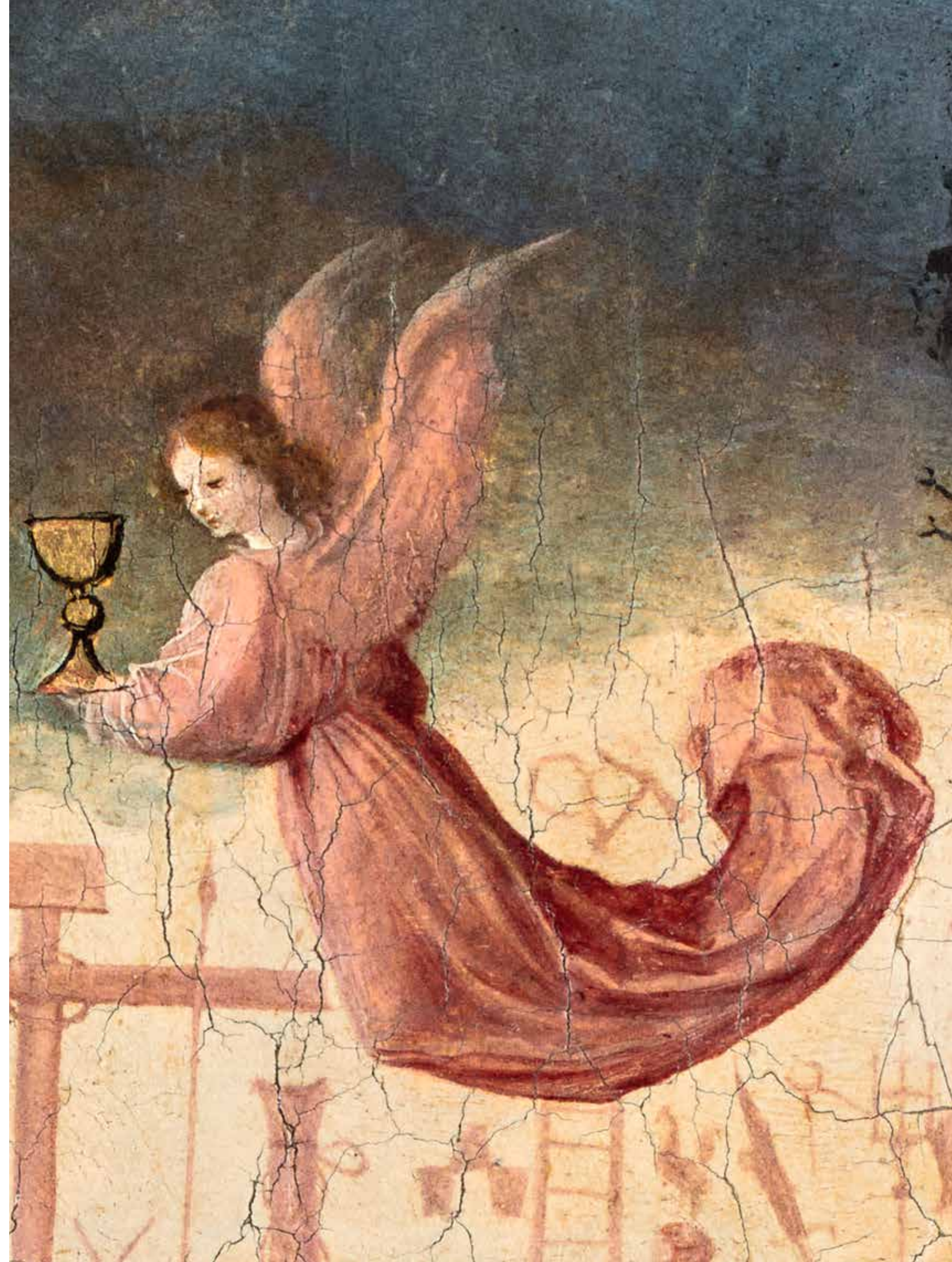
When Diego Angulo revealed the existence of these two altarpiece compartments in 1939, they belonged to the collection of the Count of Montseny, in Barcelona.<sup>1</sup> At that time the title was held by Josep Maria Milà i Camps (1887-1955), first Count of Montseny. Years later, in 1950, Chandler Rathfon Post would refer to the same paintings, claiming that he had been able to see them in situ en 1931 when “they were in the Milà Collection at Barcelona”.<sup>2</sup> As such, we can confirm that the panels belonged to the same person between 1931 and 1939, and did not change hands as one might imagine if one did not look closely into who the owners of the collections mentioned by the two historians were (being in fact the same collection). Furthermore, thanks to a series of photos from Barcelona’s Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic, we know that they were part of a private collection in the city in 1987,<sup>3</sup> (FIG. 0) which was the last we knew of them until they appeared on the Madrid art market in 2019.

The first of these two altarpiece compartments depicts *The Agony in the Garden*, one of the most popular episodes from the Passion cycle (fig. 1). According to the Gospels (Matthew 26: 36-46; Mark 14: 32-42; Luke 22: 39-46), the events took place immediately after the Last Supper and just before Christ’s Arrest or the Kiss of Judas. We see Jesus at the center of the composition, slightly to the left. He is pictured kneeling down at the base of a sort of mound, lit up by a shaft of light coming from the moon, whose presence is highlighted. Christ, who is seen with a golden cruciform halo, wears a robe of intense green, at the bot-

tom of which we can see one of his bare feet. The garment is decorated with gold trimming at the bottom, cuffs and collar. The Son of God’s head is tilted slightly upwards, looking towards the heavens, where an angel appears before him carrying a chalice in clear reference to the Passion to come. The presence of this angelic figure demonstrates that we are following the Gospel of Luke (22: 43), which mentions that Christ prayed on his knees and that an angel appeared before him to give him strength. Be that as it may, the metaphorical nature of the chalice borne by the angel immediately disappears if we focus on the back of the composition, where all of the *Arma Christi* are bathed in blinding light, depicted in the same pinkish tone as the angel’s robe (fig. 2). We can clearly make out the cross, the Crown of Thorns stuck into one of the lengths of wood, the Lance of Longinus, Steven’s stick with the Holy Sponge soaked in vinegar, the Veronica, the column of Christ’s Flagellation, the ladder used for the Descent, the rooster and the pincers, among others. These are pictured on the top of a hill, just in front of the city of Jerusalem, which has been placed between said hill and the gate to the garden.

Christ is accompanied by three sleeping apostles who are suffering the consequences of an overly copious supper. Two of them may be easily identified. In the central section we can see Saint James, asleep while sitting with his arms crossed over his chest (fig. 3). He is wearing a

**Fig. 2.** Alejo Fernández. *The Agony in the Garden* (detail).







reddish robe with golden cuffs and collar, and on top he has a cloak of a delicate orange hue. Just behind Jesus we find Saint John the Evangelist (**fig. 4**). The figure of the young apostle has been executed with great delicacy, especially with regard to his golden appearance, caused by the fact that he is pictured illuminated, making his halo, robe and the golden sheen of his hair all blend together chromatically. It is also significant that we can only see his head and arms. The panel has not been trimmed on the left side, so it is clear that the partial depiction of the apostle was the result of a compositional device on the part of the painter, who thereby shows off his skills at inter-relating what is included within, and excluded from, the field of the composition.

This visual interplay is even more pronounced in the figure of the third apostle, who we can only identify as being Saint Peter if we go by what the Gospels tell us (**fig. 5**). In this case we could almost speak in terms of the artist's *divertimento*, given we can only see the bottom half of Peter's body. He is also wearing a reddish robe with gold trimming, and we can see his bare feet quite clearly. Without doubt the painter was attempting to catch the viewer's eye with the powerful juxtaposition between one apostle whose upper body is pictured and a second figure of whom we can only see the lower extremities.

The action is framed within the garden of Gethsemane, freely depicted with lush and abundant vegetation, but where we cannot see a single olive tree. In the foreground the grass is pictured as being of an intense green, which conjures up light effects in certain areas. We can observe long-stemmed shrubbery at the feet of Saint James, while at Peter's feet we see a slender plant with almost imperceptible white petals rendered with subtle, delicate touches of white, finely detailed and which attract our gaze (**fig.**

**6**). The vegetation is much denser in the dimly-lit area to the right, where we see the rhomboid-patterned gate to the garden. The vegetation is seen climbing up over the entrance, giving it the look of a romantic ruin. There, in the most obscure darkness we see the soldiers, who have just entered the garden to arrest the Son of God (**fig. 7**). They can be identified by their helmets, pikes and spears but, more than anything, through the four orange brushstrokes with which the painter gives them away. We do not know who they are waiting for, nor do we see them being led by Judas as tended to be the norm. They appear to be whispering to each other, as if planning how to arrest Jesus.

On the left of the composition, in the background, we observe an edifice that clearly alludes to the Holy City (**fig. 8**). The ensemble is made up of a tower crowned with a four-gabled roof and a circular building that is reminiscent of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The latter has a gateway that opens via a round arch, inside of which we can see a crowd of figures bearing spears, who look like soldiers. Five tiny brushstrokes with a mix of yellow and orange produce a potent lighting effect that we sense is emanating from burning torches.

One of the best-executed aspects of the painting is its lighting, which bears witness to an artist of great skill and extensive resources. Faithful to the Gospel texts, the painter has painted the scene at night. The main source of light comes from the upper section, where we see the moon struggle to break out from behind two-toned grey storm clouds (**fig. 8**). The shaft of moonlight is focussed on the figure of Christ, who is perfectly illuminated. The concentration of light is particularly visible in the area of ground where Jesus is kneeling, while it also shines on Saint John. Despite Jesus having his back to the light, his face is particularly well lit (**fig. 9**), as are the buildings in the background. We can observe a further point of intense illumination in the area housing the instruments of the Passion, which stand out underneath the dark clouds. In addition, the painter amused himself by showing off his technical skills by

**Fig. 3.** Alejo Fernández. The Agony in the Garden (detail). Jaime Eguiguren, Buenos Aires.





**Fig. 4:** Alejo Fernández. The Agony in the Garden (detail).

**Fig. 5:** Alejo Fernández. The Agony in the Garden (detail).

**Fig. 6:** Alejo Fernández. The Agony in the Garden (detail).

developing two particularly virtuoso sections of the painting, which we have already seen when referring to the soldiers coming into the garden via the gate and the arched entrance to the circular building at the back.

As mentioned earlier, Luke's Gospel tells us that Christ was on his knees praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and God sent an angel to bring him succor. In 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-century Hispanic painting, this angel is often pictured carrying a chalice, as is the case here, or the cross of martyrdom. This detail was a clear prefiguration of what was awaiting Christ in the immediate future. It was a divine sign, a warning; a premonition. How-







**Fig. 7, 8:** Alejo Fernández. *The Agony in the Garden* (detail).



**Fig. 9:** Alejo Fernández. *The Agony in the Garden* (detail).

ever, in this work there is an unusual detail. That is the aforementioned depiction in the background, and just behind the angel, of the instruments of the Passion, the Arma Christi, in the middle of a clearly symbolic burst of light (**fig. 2**). Their presence strips the chalice of its metaphorical purpose, robbing it of its symbolism. In any case, it was not common in the painting of the time to depict the instruments of Christ's Passion in the background

of this scene. We can only attribute this to the artist's free and considered decision to introduce a number of elements that might add content to his depiction. The same composition, without the Arma Christi, would have a completely different meaning, given that the angel and the chalice would have a far greater and more obvious evocative and metaphoric charge. Here, on the other hand, they lose that function.





Fig. 10: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column.



Fig. 11: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column (detail).

The second of the panels depicts the moment just after the Flagellation of Christ (John 19: 1; Mark 15: 15; Matthew 27: 26), once the punishment has finished, as the soldiers are no longer flogging Christ (fig. 10). The scene may therefore be identified as that of *Christ at the Column*. Jesus is pictured tied to a thin mottled pillar with a rope around his wrists. A second rope is passed around his neck, like a noose, and there is also one round his feet, though this has been cut, presumably because the punishment is now over. Christ is naked other than a *peri-*



Fig. 12: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column (detail).

*zonium*, and he is pictured with a golden cruciform halo. His has extremely long straight hair which is falling down his left side. The wounds inflicted on his body are clear to see, with lash marks on his torso, thighs and arms, while both his face and left arm are bruised. He is a man in pain, and his body language and the absent look on his face bear clear witness to the fact (fig. 11).

On the floor, at the feet of the Son of God, we can observe the whips used by the soldiers,





Fig. 13: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column (detail).

Fig. 14: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column (detail).

alongside the rope that tied his feet and some discreet bloodstains (fig. 12). On the right as we look, something like a piece of paper or white cloth is an additional anecdotal detail provided by the painter. And in the background, a bundle of sticks or reeds is lying on the floor, which has also been used to punish Christ's body. On the left of the composition we see a finely-dressed dignitary sat on some kind of bench covered by a green cloth (fig. 13). This must have been Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who the Gospels tell us was responsible for Christ being flogged. After the macabre episode that has just taken place, he appears to be addressing Christ, making a slight gesture with his right

hand, almost pointing towards him, as a sort of interjection. This could mean that the artist is trying to combine this scene with that of the questioning Jesus was subjected to by Pilate (John 19: 9-11; Mark 15: 2-5; Matthew 27: 11-14; Luke 23: 1-3). The governor wears a luxurious robe made with gold leaf decorated with punch marks and plant motifs applied using the *esto-fado* technique. The collar, cuffs and the lower trim of the robe appear to be made of white muslin. His face, in profile, shows him to be a Jew by the prominent nose with which he is depicted, along with his long beard. He is also pictured wearing a curious wide-brimmed and delicately-colored hat (fig. 14).





Fig. 15, 16: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column (detail).

The two soldiers are exhausted, completely worn out. This is shown by their contrapposto poses and crossed legs (fig. 15). They are leaning one arm on their spears with the other hand on their hips. One is looking absently towards the floor, while the other is craning his neck upwards and to the right. They are wearing silver-plated helmets decorated with spiral scrollwork (fig. 16). They are both wearing clothes that go to reinforce their negative characters. Their outfit is made up of two garments comprising a sort of long undershirt and a red-dish sleeveless outer smock, fastened around the waist with rope and which, in the case of one of them, also passes over his shoulder. The shirt is best seen in the soldier on the right (fig. 17). The painter shows off his great skill in applying coats of glaze on top of the green, in such a way that the garment acquires a highly aesthetic iridescent effect, especially in the shaded area. The shirts' low necks reveal part of the soldiers' chests and, having short sleeves, do not cover their arms. This semi-nudity is repeated in the case of their legs, which are left bare to above the knee. With regard to their footwear, this is kept to a minimum.



They are wearing leather ankle-boots through which, in the case of one of the soldiers, we catch sight of the wearer's toes. The soldiers' semi-naked bodies remind us of the image of the fool, he who does not recognize the word of the Gospels and denies the divine nature of the Son of God.<sup>4</sup>

The action takes place in an interior of credible and realistic dimensions, in proportion to the size of the four people in it. It is pictured as a closed space with rib vaults and two openings onto the outside. The first of these is an arch leading to a set of steps than can only be intuited due to the change in floor level, just beyond which we can see a door giving a glimpse of an autumnal landscape with a tree and some green and brown plant elements. The second opening is a large window with leaded glass in which the artist once again makes a show of his masterful skill at handling light (fig. 18). This is without doubt one of the most finely-executed parts of the work, where the painter demonstrates an evident virtuosity in the use of color and the ability to generate identifiable forms through smudges of



Fig. 17, 18: Alejo Fernández. Christ at the Column.

color. In this case, the use of green and ochre tones builds up an autumnal landscape that is blurred as it is viewed through the glass.

This technical virtuosity is seen once again in the scene's treatment of light, using the same devices we analyzed in our study of *The Agony*

in the Garden compartment. We observe how Pilate is holding a sort of torch or source of light, which he is leaning against his left shoulder (fig. 13). It has a pineapple-shaped head and its light lends the brocade on the governor's robe a variety of chromatic nuances that are worthy of note, ranging from the most intense yellow-gold, passing through an orange hue to the most nuanced tones of red, using a device similar to the one we saw in the depiction of Saint John the Evangelist in *The Agony in the Garden* (fig. 4). The proximity of the torch to Pilate's hat also allows the painter to experiment with its volume, applying orange-colored brushstrokes to various parts, which lend it a certain iridescence (fig. 14). That source of light would appear to be responsible for casting the shadows that take form from the seat where Pilate is sitting and from the bottom of the column to which Christ is tied, given that they come from the left and are projected towards the right. We observe the same casting of shadows in the soldiers' legs, although in their case the source of light generating them is the window, which palely illuminates the whole central part of the floor.



## ATTRIBUTION

Their measurements, format, subject and style leave no doubt that both paintings were part of the same altarpiece. Their dimensions and the fact that they are dedicated to the Passion indicate they formed part of the predella of an altarpiece of no great size, as already pointed out by Diego Angulo when he unveiled the two works. We should rule out the possibility that the compositions were trimmed when they were transferred onto canvas, despite the fact that a couple of the figures from *The Agony in the Garden*, in particular Saint Peter, seem oddly incomplete. As noted earlier, this was an expressive device on the part of the painter, as Post once observed.<sup>5</sup> Confirmation that the compositions have not undergone resizing can be found in the basket-handle arch in the reserve area at the top of the composition, painted grey and depicted in its entirety. Running across the top of the reserve would have been the altarpiece's gilt framework, which has not survived.

With regard to authorship, at the time of the unveiling of the two altarpiece compartments, Angulo deemed them the work of Alejo Fernández “or at least his workshop”. Post, on the other hand, did not hesitate for a moment to attribute them directly to the master, on account of their quality. This option has been recently confirmed by Juan Antonio Gómez in his doctoral thesis on the painter, where he observes that “they are most certainly the work of Alejo Fernández, and may be dated to around 1508-1515, presenting the miniaturist *fattura* characteristic of the

painter in small-scale pieces”.<sup>6</sup> It is certainly true that the quality of both paintings, and certain details regarding their execution demonstrate, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they are both by Fernández. In terms of composition, in *The Agony in the Garden* the painter has followed a model that was widespread in Hispanic painting at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. He opted for solutions similar to those we can find in other altarpieces produced by his workshop, such as the triptych preserved at the Basilica de Nuestra Señora del Pilar, in Zaragoza.<sup>7</sup> Although the composition is different, there are parallels in the similar position occupied by Christ, the presence of the burst of light in the background illuminating the Arma Christi, or in more trivial details such as the type of halos and the reddish tone of some of the robes. One of the most significant similarities is that the scene is nocturnal and the painter once again exhibits his skills in the use of different intensities of light.

This approach to specific episodes from Christ's Passion as highly dramatized nocturnal scenarios is something we find once again in a panel depicting the *Arrest of Christ* that came up for sale on the market recently (Sam Fogg, London, 2015)<sup>8</sup>. (Fig. 19) Here we see Fernández using similar aesthetic and visual devices, such as the depiction of torch flames and other lighting effects, or the still-smoking lamp in the foreground, which speaks of the artist's interest in anecdotal detail. We also see a return of the orange tone in the soldiers' armor, as well as the



Fig. 19: *Arrest of Christ*. Sam Fogg, London, 2015



architectural features in the background which, as in our compartment, are used to illuminate the triumphal arch pictured at the back. We also find a repeat of the splash of light between the clouds, making way for the angel who is bringing Christ the cross of martyrdom, as this *Arrest of Christ* condenses two episodes in one, also depicting *The Agony in the Garden* at the back of the composition. The way the vegetation in the foreground is executed is exactly the same, with long-stemmed plants like those in front of Saint James in our panel.

Fernández would return to the Gethsemane episode in the altarpiece from the Priory Church of Nuestra Señora de los Milagros in Puerto de Santa María (Cadiz).<sup>9</sup> This is a workshop piece from around 1533, later than our compartment works. This later date, as well as the obvious involvement of collaborators in its execution, go to explain the compositional differences and contrasts in general treatment with regard to the work we are studying here. There is no longer that striking interplay of light and darkness, but we do find ourselves once again encountering figures depicted with similar characterizations, similar halos and clothes with similar gold trimming.

One of the most interesting aspects of our *The Agony in the Garden* relates to the edifice at the back (fig. 8) which, as we have already mentioned, can only be identified as the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulcher. Gómez observed that its architectural structure was inspired by an Ehrard Reuwich engraving included in Bernhard von Breidenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*<sup>10</sup>. (Fig. 20) The painter was familiar with the work, using the wood engravings that illustrated it on repeated occasions in several of his paintings. One example that is particularly close to hand is that he used the same engraving to depict a similar architectural feature in the Descent compartment of the altarpiece of the church of Santiago de Écija (Seville) as well as in a panel depicting the Incredulity of Saint Thomas from the church of Santiago in Hinojos (Huelva). Furthermore, Gómez noted that its inclusion in our painting was a logical allusion to



Fig. 20: Bernhard von Breidenbach's. *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam*.



Fig. 21: *Temptation of Christ*. Altarpiece of Marchena (Seville).



Fig. 22: *Christ at the Column with Saint Peter and donors*. Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba (Spain).



the Holy City and Redemption through a building symbolic of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Said architecture also bears close similarities with what we find in the altarpiece of Marchena, depicting the *Temptation of Christ*<sup>12</sup>. (Fig. 21)

With regard to our *Christ at the Column*, this is a subject we find returned to in several works by the painter. All of these include one prominent aspect common to depictions of this subject in Andalusian iconography, which is the focus on the events immediately after the flagellation. This detail should be associated with a certain devotional tendency in that region for emotive images of this type, emphasizing the pain and suffering Jesus went through during his martyrdom. These representations link up with early middle-age textual references such as the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget of Sweden, highlighting the iconic power of images of this kind.<sup>13</sup> We find them in different painters from the Cordoba of the day, such as the anonymous author of a panel preserved at Dresden Museum in which the Christ at the Column is depicted alongside a Penitent Saint Peter.<sup>14</sup>

Of Fernández's works we ought to mention the serge with *Christ at the Column with Saint Peter and Donors* from the Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba, (Fig. 22) originally housed in the city's convent of Santa Clara, and dating from around 1500.<sup>15</sup> Like our panel, it also depicts the moment immediately after the flagellation, in which the three donors and Peter are worshipping the flogged Christ who is pictured tied by his wrist to the column. The way the architecture is executed is remarkable in the classicism of the elements depicted, whereas in our work the artist has opted for a far more austere room covered by ribbed vaulting. They do however share in suggesting the outside at both sides, as well as in Christ's position and body language, leaning on the column, in addition to the lateral lighting effect that allows for the casting of shadows on the floor. One interesting aspect from the Cordoba work is the presence of a female figure kneeling at the base of the column, who has been identified as the aforementioned Bridget of Sweden, who wrote that she herself had



Fig. 23: *Flagellation*. Museo del Prado, Madrid (Spain).

witnessed the flagellation in her visions: "At the first blow I, who stood nearest, fell as if dead and, on recovering my senses, I beheld his body bruised and beaten to the very ribs". As in our case, the image presented by Fernández is not that of a bleeding Christ, but a far more meditative and contemplative vision inviting the viewer to engage in empathic worship.<sup>16</sup>

Equally interesting is one of the compartments from the predella of the *Altarpiece of the Lamentation* in Seville Cathedral, a work from around 1527 commissioned by Mencía de Salazar.<sup>17</sup> The subject is, once again, that of *Christ at the Column*, which here has the added interest of being

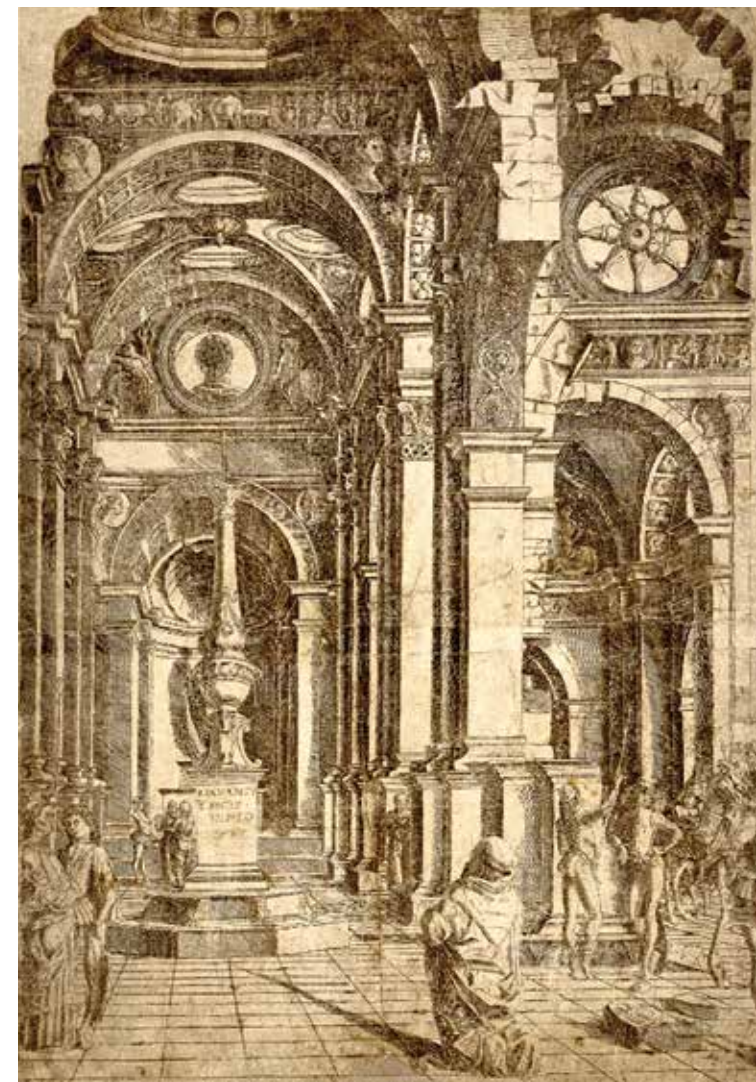


Fig. 24: Bernardo Prevedari.

depicted as a nocturnal scene. The penitent Peter is there once again on his knees before Christ. Other aspects that echo our compartment include the depiction of the exhausted soldiers, and the detail of the cut rope lying on the floor alongside the whips. The work thereby communicates the feeling that the punishment has just concluded. The source of light allowing for the interplay of light and shadow, coming from a bright flame, is situated on the left of the composition, in front of a low wall, casting a weak light on the figures leaning on it.

It would appear that Alejo Fernández had a particular predilection for depicting episodes

directly relating to the Flagellation, given that the aforementioned Puerto de Santa María altarpiece includes a scene from just beforehand, when Christ is untied from the column by one of his captors. The punishment has just finished, as we can see the marks it has left on the body of Jesus, as well as the whips lying on the floor. The moment chosen, then, was just prior to the one we have been analyzing thus far. We once again witness the figure of the apostle Peter.<sup>18</sup>

Although it depicts a moment just prior to the one we are studying here, we should still mention one of Fernández's most well-known works, the *Flagellation* housed at the Museo del Prado<sup>19</sup>, (Fig. 23) as there are elements appertaining to the subject that the two works share in common. In the Prado panel we observe a far more complex composition, structured around a use of perspective that Fernández undertakes with great skill by placing the figures in a credible space, and through the classical depiction of the architectural structures. It is therefore difficult to compare this work with the compartment we are dealing with here, particularly, from this point of view, because ours relates to a time in the artist's career when his interest for depicting modern and complex interiors and architectural surroundings in a classical style had waned compared to in his earlier works, such as the Prado *Flagellation* or the *Christ at the Column* from the Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba. As such, in our case he decided to present a small and unpretentious box-space, as Gómez would put it.<sup>20</sup> All the same, his desire to draw inspiration from engravings in line with artistic modernity did not desert him, given the soldier on the right, with one hand on his hip, seems inspired by a figure from a rare engraving by Bernardo Prevedari based on a Bramante design (1481)<sup>21</sup>, (Fig. 24) which was the same one he used for the Prado *Flagellation*, as once observed by Angulo,<sup>22</sup> as well as in other works.

As mentioned earlier, the style of the two compartments we are dealing with here clearly points to an Alejo Fernández authorship. All



of the figures, including Christ, present highly characteristic faces, matching human types we find time and time again in works by Fernández in his Seville period, which started in 1508. The hands and faces bear witness to the work of a skilled master, who also takes time out to depict vegetation and the natural environment, as we see in *The Agony in the Garden*. It is also worth emphasizing, as we noted earlier, the brilliance and nuances we find in the figures located closest to the sources of light, especially those near fire. In terms of composition, Fernández was a particularly careful painter when it came to his approach to space, always attempting to present the figures in credible scenarios, whether interior or exterior, and this can be well appreciated in both compartments. It is as such that the size of their bodies are in proportion to the surroundings housing them.

Juan Antonio Gómez dated the two works, *The Agony in the Garden* and *Christ at the Column*, to around 1508-1515,<sup>23</sup> that is to say following the artist's early years in Cordoba and after moving to Seville. We can therefore observe that the style bears close similarities to a pair of panels including the aforementioned *Arrest of Christ*, which came onto the market in London a few years ago, and a second panel belonging to the same altarpiece depicting *Christ carrying the Cross*, which also came onto the market recently (Jaime Eguiguren, Buenos Aires, 2018) (**Fig. 25**). In our opinion, and as we argued at the time, these could have been painted in 1510-1520.<sup>24</sup> We have detected marked similarities in the way the painter approaches the figures' characterization, with the same facial features. We see this in both Jesus and Pilate from *Christ at the Column*, which bear close parallels to both Jesus and Simon of Cyrene in the *Christ carrying the Cross* panel. The Christ from *The Agony in the Garden* is also similar to the Jesus from the *Arrest of Christ*. Furthermore, the Christ from *The Agony in the Garden* panel also bears similarities to that of the *Arrest of Christ*. In addition, we observe the same interest for anecdotal and secondary details, such as the sort of sticking plaster worn by Christ's captor in

the latter panel, or the same type of rope used. The cruciform halo featured on our Christ is also extremely similar to those Christ wears in the two works in question, while the shadows cast on the floor by the figures' legs are almost identical. We might also mention the gold trim of Christ's robe, which appears both in the two panels mentioned and in *The Agony in the Garden*, or the iridescent appearance of the clothes of the captor who has Christ bound by the neck on his way to Calvary, which can be seen to a lesser degree in the green of the undergarments of the soldiers in *Christ at the Column*. To all of the above we should also add the nocturnal setting chosen by Fernández for both the *Arrest of Christ* and *Christ at the Column*, using similar aesthetic devices.

We could mention numerous wide-ranging parallels with works from the period. Without attempting to provide an exhaustive list, in *The Agony in the Garden* we see that the face of Saint John the Evangelist and his rather unkempt golden hair are reminiscent of the Saint Michael from the altarpiece of Maese Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella (ca. 1515-1520), housed at the chapel of the Colegio de Santa María de Jesús in Seville,<sup>25</sup> while also bearing a resemblance to the angel from the *Annunciation* from the since-lost Villasana de Mena (Burgos) altarpiece (ca. 1512-1517).<sup>26</sup> Saying that, one of the clearest parallels is that of the angel who appears in the lower left section of *Our Lady of the Rose* from the parish of Santa Ana in Seville (ca. 1526), especially in terms of the half-reclining pose, facial features and the execution of the curly hair.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Pilate's profile from the *Christ at the Column* panel is reminiscent of the Judas from the *Arrest of Christ* sold in London, and also of the male figure who appears in the left-hand section of the *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* panel from the altarpiece in the church of Marchena (Seville) (ca. 1520-1533). In the latter altarpiece we also find that the face of Christ from the *Marriage at Cana* bears a close resemblance to that of Jesus in *The Agony in the Garden*.<sup>28</sup> In terms of how the artist casts shadows, this is identical to what we



**Fig. 25:** *Christ carrying the Cross*. Jaime Eguiguren Buenos Aires, 2018.

find in a number of elements from the aforementioned *Christ at the Column* from Cordoba's Museum of Fine Arts, as well as in the Prado's *Flagellation*. We also see some of the same devices used in compartments from the Marchena altarpiece, such as in the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* or in a *Nativity* that has passed through a number of different

private collections in Seville and Barcelona.<sup>30</sup> Finally, we ought to mention that, in our *Christ at the Column*, the way of presenting a room in which there is a side opening through which one can make out the exterior, is reminiscent of a similar device used by Fernández in the scene depicting the *Marriage at Cana* from the aforementioned altarpiece in Marchena.<sup>31</sup>



## THE PAINTER: ALEJO FERNÁNDEZ

(DOC. 1496-1545)

Alejo Fernández was a master painter documented in Andalusia between 1496 and 1545, a lengthy period of time stretching from the last gasps of the late Gothic until the complete consolidation of the Renaissance a la *romana* style.<sup>32</sup> Although it is presumed that he was born in around 1475, the first known documentary records we have of him place him in Cordoba in the 1490s, where he married María, daughter of the painter Pedro Fernández. This must have served to smooth the way to his obtaining a good professional standing on the artistic scene in the city. He adopted the Fernández family name, doubtless for that very reason. As far as documented commissions are concerned, from that time we have only a few indirect records regarding the execution of a number of altarpieces for the monastery of San Jerónimo in Cordoba, which have not survived today.<sup>33</sup>

In about 1508 he moved to Seville to participate in the undertaking of the cathedral's main altarpiece, a project which, under the archbishopric of Diego de Deza, was given a new lease of life, and on which he worked until 1525.<sup>34</sup> His renown would grow from the moment of his arrival in Seville, until he became the main painter in a city where, by 1526, there were more than 30 painters working.<sup>35</sup> As such, there is no doubt whatsoever that Alejo Fernández was Seville's most important master painter in the first third of the 16th century, a fact that led numerous artists to emulate his style and artistic methods.<sup>36</sup>

**Fig. 26:** Alejo Fernández. Altarpiece from Maese Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella's chapel. (Seville).





His workshop received commissions not just from Seville and the surrounding area, but from throughout the Kingdom of Castile, such as Cuenca and Burgos. From this period we have documented records of commissions for the cathedral of Seville (portrait of King Ferdinand, 1508); the Charterhouse of Santa María de las Cuevas (altarpieces, 1509); Seville cathedral (repair of a canvas, 1510); Santa María in Carmona (execution of a monstrance, 1510); the cathedral of Seville (miniatures for a choir book and an unspecified commission, 1514 and 1520); Santa Clara in Seville (commission for an altarpiece in collaboration with Pedro Fernández de Guadalupe and Antón Sánchez, 1520); the cathedral of Seville (samples for an altarpiece and grille, 1520); the church of San Juan and the Hospital de la Sangre in Jerez de la Frontera (a range of altarpieces and polychrome images, 1520 and 1523); San Juan in Marchena (payments for the completion of an altarpiece, 1520-1521); an unspecified commission in Cuenca (1522); Santa María in Manzanilla (Huelva) (altarpiece, 1525); Charles V's entrance into Seville (1526); Seville cathedral (altarpiece for the chapel of Mencía de Salazar, 1527); the monastery of San Pablo in Seville (altarpiece for Constanza de Guzmán, 1528); church of Santiago in Jerez de la Frontera (altarpiece in collaboration with other painters, 1543); and, finally, Seville's church of San Pedro (repair work to an image and painting an altarpiece, 1543 and 1544-1545, respectively).<sup>37</sup>

With regard to known or surviving works from his early years in Cordoba, we could mention the aforementioned serge depicting *Christ at the Column with Donors* from the Museo de Bellas Artes de Córdoba, dated to around 1500; the *Triptych of the Last Supper* from the Basilica del Pilar in Zaragoza, and the *Flagellation* from the Museo del Prado. Moving on to his Seville period, the cathedral still houses four panels depicting the Virgin, originally intended for the back of the main altarpiece beam, completed between 1508 and 1513.<sup>38</sup> From 1515-1520 we have the aforementioned

altarpiece from Maese Rodrigo Fernández de Santaella's chapel (**Fig. 26**). Furthermore, the Burgos-born Sancho de Matienzo (†1521), who ended up being the canon of Seville cathedral, commissioned Fernández to undertake two altarpieces for the Franciscan convent of Villasana de Mena (Burgos), dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and to Our Lady of Milk, the second bearing the signature of the painter in its main compartment. These have been dated to around 1517-1521, and disappeared during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>39</sup>

A second panel dedicated to Mary is the aforementioned *Our Lady of the Rose* from Santa Ana church in Seville (ca. 1526), and not too long ago it was discovered that the panel with the *Virgin and Child* housed in the Archbishop's Palace in Seville was also an autograph work (it bears the artist's signature).<sup>40</sup> Other signed works include an *Adoration of the Magi* formerly part of the Conde de la Viñaza's collection, and a *Saint John the Baptist* that has passed through various Madrid and Barcelona collections.<sup>41</sup> An *Archangel Gabriel* measuring 86 x 61 cm from around 1515-1520 appeared on the art market a few years ago, in all probability part of an *Annunciation*.<sup>42</sup> And yet the style in general, the relief effect of Gabriel's face, the type of halo and the golden decoration of the collar of his robe are directly reminiscent of a *Saint Anne with Virgin and Child and Donors* recently auctioned in Seville and which, moreover, is much the same size (96 x 62 cm).<sup>43</sup> To this we should add the parallels in the fabric canopy at the back and the type of cornice depicted just next to Saint Anne and, also, the vantage point just behind Gabriel. All of these similarities lead one to suppose that both panels were part of the same altarpiece.<sup>44</sup>

In about 1527, and in collaboration with other painters, Alejo Fernández started work on the *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* altarpiece from Seville cathedral, commissioned by Mencía de Salazar.<sup>45</sup> Also dated to that period — ca. 1525-1530 — is a *Beheading of*

*Saint John the Baptist* that came on the market in 1997.<sup>46</sup> Among his later works (dated to between 1531 and 1536), we find the *Virgin of the Seafarers*, the central panel from the altarpiece of Seville's Casa de la Contratación, today on display in the city's Alcázar.<sup>47</sup>

From the 1520s, the role of the artists in Alejo Fernández's workshop grew due to the sheer quantity of commissions received, which explains why altarpieces such as the Écija one,<sup>48</sup> and even the one in Marchena (recorded as being from 1520-1521, with final installation in 1533) present clear stylistic contrasts with earlier works.<sup>49</sup> One could say much the same of the so-called *Triptych of the Virgin of the Angels* from the old collection of the Marquesa de Hoyos (Jerez de la Frontera), a contemporaneously assembled ensemble of panels recently returned to its place in the artist's canon, and about whose authorship historiography had voiced certain doubts.<sup>50</sup> The same could be said for the *Crowning with Thorns* from the Museo de Cadiz, presenting further problems in differentiating between the master's own paintings and those where the contribution of artists from his workshop predominates.<sup>51</sup>

Angulo also published a lengthy list of works, from both private and public collections, where he called for in-depth study to determine Fernández's degree of involvement. These include the *Annunciation* from the Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla, an *Annunciation* and an *Adoration of the Magi* (on canvas) on sale in Madrid,<sup>52</sup> *The Agony in the Garden* and *Christ at the Column* being studied here (at that time part of the collection of the Conde de Montseny), the Marquesa de Hoyos' aforementioned panels, the Marchena altarpiece also mentioned earlier, and the *Flagellation* at the Museo del Prado, the majority of whose authorship is no longer in doubt.<sup>53</sup>

Following Angulo and Post's efforts, the painter's catalogue of works has been joined by new

attributions, such as that of the Saint Martin altarpiece in Villanueva de la Jara (Cuenca), which could perhaps be linked with the painter's recorded trip to Cuenca in 1522.<sup>54</sup> Another attribution is the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* from the church in Hinojos (Huelva),<sup>55</sup> and an *Embrace at the Golden Gate* from the parish of Espera (Cadiz).<sup>56</sup> We should also add a *Descent of Christ* that went on sale in London in 1943,<sup>57</sup> and a panel on the same subject, of good quality and dimensions (188 x 186 cm), auctioned at Sotheby's in 2010.<sup>58</sup> All the same, in certain cases it is difficult to ascertain to what degree Fernández's brush is present, and the fact is that some may have been the work of his workshop or, even, of contemporary Seville painters influenced by his style.

The most recent review of the Alejo Fernández catalogue was undertaken in Juan Antonio Gómez's doctoral thesis (2016), with new pieces joining it, while other works that had been unjustifiably included have now been removed. Of the new arrivals, we should highlight a *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* from the Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon, which said author believes is probably a work from the early period; a *Birth of the Virgin*, which came onto the market a few years ago; a *Resurrection of Christ*, auctioned in Seville in 2015, which is of great quality and should be considered a work intended for private worship; a *Saint James the Less*, auctioned in Madrid in 2000; a *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, formerly preserved in the monastery of Santa Inés del Valle (Écija); a *Calvary* from the Rhode Island School of Design museum (Providence, US); an *Immaculate Conception with Donors*, known only by old photos and formerly housed in the now-disappeared convent of the Immaculate Conception in Carmona (Seville); the panels introduced into the altarpiece of the Capilla de las Doncellas in Seville cathedral and, finally the altarpiece from the Capilla de la Magdalena also from the cathedral of Seville.<sup>59</sup>



# NOTES

1. ANGULO 1939, pp. 44-45, fig. 2.

2. POST 1950, p. 82, n. 47. The Milà family was a powerful force in the Barcelona world of business and politics. The earldom of Montseny was created by King Alphonse XIII in 1926, as a reward for the endeavors of the aforementioned Josep Maria Milà i Camps, who reached the position of chairman of the Diputació de Barcelona. He was also the cousin of Pere Milà, the Catalan lawyer, industrialist and politician who commissioned Antoni Gaudí to build one of the most symbolic Catalan Modernist buildings, Casa Milà, popularly known as La Pedrera.

3. Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic (hereinafter, IAAH), ref. E-11663, E-11664, E-11667, E-11668 and E-11669, year 1987.

4. See PHILIP 1953.

5. Post 1950, p. 85.

6. ANGULO 1939, pp. 44-45; POST 1950, pp. 82-85; GÓMEZ 2016, p. 104. Cfr. VELASCO 2018, p. 42 and 46.

7. ANGULO 1946, plate 5; GÓMEZ 2016, p. 68, fig. 16.

8. HERMAN 2015.

9. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 229, fig. 224.

10. This work was widely disseminated throughout the Hispanic territory from the end of the 15th century, being printed, for instance, in Zaragoza (1498). See TENA 1995 and TENA 2000.

11. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 34 and p. 105, with a reproduction of the image in question on p. 126, fig. 85. For more on the Écija altarpiece and the Hinojos panel, p. 225, fig. 217-218 and pp. 203-204, fig. 188, respectively.

12. IAAH, ref. Mas C-83029.

13. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 64.

14. POST 1950, pp. 207-209, fig. 75, associating it with Pedro Romana.

15. ANGULO 1946, pp. 11-12, plates. 1-3; POST 1950, pp. 51-54, fig. 10.

16. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 64.

17. ANGULO 1946, pp. 22-23; GÓMEZ 2016, p. 188, fig. 158.

18. We do not agree with Gómez’s interpretation, which identifies the scene with the moment at which Christ is tied to the column in order to be flogged. See GÓMEZ 2016, p. 229, fig. 225.

19. GARCÍA MÁIQUEZ-GARRIDO 2006.

20. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 104.

21. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 106, figs. 52-53.

22. ANGULO 1953, pp. 5-8.

23. GÓMEZ 2016, p. 104.

24. VELASCO 2018. Gómez also published the Arrest of Christ and dated it to around 1520. See GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 310-311.

25. ANGULO 1946, plates. 13-19; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 302-306.

26. ANGULO 1946, plate. 21; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 275-278.

27. ANGULO 1946, plate. 26; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 316-320.

28. IAAH, ref. Mas C-83012; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 311-316.

29. ANGULO 1946, plate. 47.

30. IAAH, ref. 48392 and 48304 plus two photos without reference numbers. GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 293-295.

31. ANGULO 1946, plate. 47.

32. For more on the painter, see ANGULO 1946; POST 1950, 8-93; MARTÍN 1988; GÓMEZ 2016; VELASCO 2018.

33. CEÁN 1800, vol. V, pp. 304-305.

34. PALOMERO 1981, pp. 91-120; MORÓN 1981; HERRERA 2009, pp. 43-53.

35. ESCUREDO 2015, p. 10.

36. ANGULO 1946, p. 7.

37. For the sources of this series of references, see MARTÍN 1988, pp. 5-32 and GÓMEZ 2016.

38. ANGULO 1946, pp. 13-14, plates. 6-1 POST 1950, pp. 62-66, fig. 14; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 267-272.

39. ANGULO 1943; ANGULO 1946, pp. 16-18, plates. 20-25; POST 1950, pp. 21-27 and 66-69, figs. 1-2 and 15; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 273-278.

40. POST 1950, p. 76, fig. 20; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 300-302.

41. ANGULO 1946, pp. 13-14, plates. 28-29. For more on the Adoration of the Magi, also see ANGULO 1930. With regard to the Saint John the Baptist, a photograph from Barcelona’s Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic (ref. Gudiol 58135) certifies that it subsequently joined the Bertrán collection in Barcelona. For both works also see GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 278-279 and 281-283.

42. It was revealed by NAVARRETE 1997a. Cfr. GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 320-321.

43. Isbylia (Seville), 14-15 April 2015, Pintura antigua, lot 120. Published in GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 325-326.

44. As suggested by us in VELASCO 2018, p. 40.

45. ANGULO 1946, pp. 22-23, plates. 36-37; POST 1950, pp. 44-47, fig. 7; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 321-325.

46. NAVARRETE 1997b. It was subsequently auctioned at Sotheby’s, Old Master Paintings and British Paintings, London, 29 April 2010, lot 7.

47. ANGULO 1946, pp. 24-25, plates. 42-45; POST 1950, pp. 76-82, fig. 21; PHILLIPS 2005, pp. 815-856; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 326-329. The side compartments of the ensemble have been attributed to his workshop or to a follower of his.

48. The panels from the Santiago church altarpiece in Écija have tended to be linked to followers or members of the Alejo Fernández workshop. See ANGULO 1946, p. 23, plates. 38-40; POST 1950, pp. 69-73, figs. 16-17; VALDIVIESO 1992, p. 56; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 343-347.

49. ANGULO 1939, pp. 48-57, figs. 5-12; ANGULO 1946, pp. 25-26, plates. 46-47; POST 1950, pp. 33-42, figs. 4-5; HERRERA 2009, pp. 53-55, plate. 44; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 311-316. Valdivieso suggested that a large portion of the painting work may have been subcontracted to painters from Fernández’s circle (VALDIVIESO 1992, p. 57).

50. MARCHENA 2004, pp. 117-135; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 284-286.

51. POST 1950, p. 82, fig. 22; PEMÁN 1952, pp. 17-18; ANGULO 1954, p. 140; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 364-366.

52. Angulo does not reproduce them in his article, but these must be the ones that appear in photographs from Barcelona’s Institut Amatller d’Art Hispànic (ref. Gudiol 43343 and 43344). They were recently auctioned in London (Sotheby’s, 2014), as revealed by GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 293-295.

53. ANGULO 1939, pp. 41-63.

54. IBÁÑEZ 1993, fig. XVIII; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 341-342.

55. Ave verum 2004, p. 210; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 331-333.

56. MARCHENA 2012. This work is not included in the itemized catalogue of GÓMEZ 2016.

57. PADRÓN 1984; GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 340-341.

58. Sotheby’s, London, 6 July 2010, The Splendour of Venice, Important Furniture and Old Master Paintings from a Private Collection, lot 148, with Isabel Mateo’s attribution.

59. GÓMEZ 2016, pp. 258-259, 283-284, 298-300, 308-309, 329-331, 333-340 and 360-364.

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